

Testimony in support funding of gun violence intervention grants

Distinguished members of the Health Appropriations Subcommittee: My name is Karen Edwards. I live in Stamford. I am a Professor of Public Health and a retired pediatrician/ public health professional. I am a supporter of Connecticut Against Gun Violence. I am testifying in support the **\$2.5 million appropriation included in the Governor's budget on Line T1449 for the Department of Public Health to fund gun violence intervention grants in FY2024, and the \$400,000 on Line 274 for operational expenses each year.** This amount is less than 1 percent of the combined FY2024 budget of DPH and the Dept. of Emergency Services and Public Protection, agencies that keep Connecticut safe. Given that preventing gun violence is an essential component of keeping communities safe, **I support a much larger grant appropriation of \$10 million in each year of the budget.** We must demonstrate to Connecticut communities strongly impacted by gun violence, which are disproportionately Black and Hispanic neighborhoods in our urban centers, that we are serious about decreasing gun violence by making a larger investment in these interventions that have been proven effective.

As a pediatrician, public health professional and parent, I strongly support this funding because it supports decreasing gun violence through PREVENTION. In 2020, firearm-related injuries became the leading cause of death in U.S. children from birth to age 19. Having spent my career providing inpatient and outpatient care to children and teens and teaching future physicians about the crucial importance of prevention in child and adolescent health, I was truly shaken to hear this. I believe that this proposed investment in community level programs aimed at decreasing gun violence is an essential component of a multi-faceted approach to preventing these child and teen deaths. Let's invest at this higher level because we know we are aiming at preventing what is now the leading cause of death in children and teens.

The impact of gun violence is broad. Last year, in Connecticut, gun homicides were the highest they've been in 25 years, at almost double the number that occurred in 2018. In addition to those it kills and injures, it affects those who witness it, especially children, and those who live with fear of gun violence in their communities. The negative impact on individuals living in communities with high levels of gun violence urgently requires this higher level of investment in this preventive solution.

In addition to these abhorrent results of gun violence, there is an enormous economic cost: estimates are that gun violence (of all kinds) costs Connecticut taxpayers between \$60 and \$90 million annually.

We can't afford to invest too little in gun violence prevention in this budget. Children, teens and young adults are dying, being injured and being otherwise negatively impacted for life. We must invest at a high enough level so that all Connecticut children have the best chance to survive and thrive into healthy adulthood.

I support the proposed funding to the Department of Health to fund gun violence intervention grants and strongly urge that this be supported at the higher level of \$10 million in each year of the budget. Thank you.

Karen Edwards MD MPH, Stamford CT